

# Opening the black box of child support

## Shining a light on the erroneous assumptions embedded in the child support system

While child support may seem relatively straightforward, it is an extremely complicated area of policy. In addition, parents must navigate this complex system without detailed information or advice regarding the implications of their decisions, particularly in the context of ongoing family violence.

The complexity of child support in policy and practice is masked by a number of assumptions that are not based in the reality of women's experiences of navigating the child support system. Here, we identify a number of erroneous assumptions that keep the operation of the child support system in the shadows before testing these using our survey data:

**I.**

Violence ends at the point of separation and non-physical violence is not as harmful as physical violence.

**2.**

Seeking an exemption is an appropriate response to family violence, and a straightforward process that will not retraumatise victim-survivors.

**3.**

Parents will not hide or minimise their incomes.

**4.**

Parents will take up the share of care recorded in their child support agreement.

**5.**

Child support assessments accurately balance payees' costs of children with payers' capacity to pay.

**6.**

Parents can freely agree on the collection type that suits them both.

**7.**

Private collections are arranged between parents who get along, will work together, and will not be used to hide payment outcomes.

**8.**

Payers will provide the assessed amount of child support, and it will be paid on time.

**9.**

Debts will be recovered through Agency Collect, including that it is straightforward for resident parents to switch from Private to Agency Collect to recover debt.

**10.**

Child support collections and shortfalls will not jeopardise women's financial security through Family Tax Benefit Part A (FTBA) shortfalls and debts.

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